

The Power of 'Loved Loves' to Heal and Educate

By Youk Chhang

As a survivor of the Khmer Rouge regime, I strongly support the new film by Chhay Bora about the Khmer Rouge period titled "Lost Loves." The film is extremely sad, yet incredibly beautiful and powerful. You can see your tears when you cry. It is an extraordinary film for several reasons.



Amara (Leav Sela) – played by Prof. Kouv Sotheary.

First, it depicts the unimaginable pain, suffering, and courage of victims of the Khmer Rouge regime with honesty, simplicity, and grace. Based on the true story of Mr. Chhay's mother-in-law, Leav Sela (Amara), this film is able to capture the raw emotions of that era using only a single camera and a modest budget. Extremely moving and heart-breaking, this film tells the story of Amara and her struggle to survive

the brutal reign of Democratic Kampuchea. Coming from a middle-class background, Amara and her family were labeled as "April 17th people" and considered corrupt, lazy, and dangerous to the Communist Party of Kampuchea. Throughout the film, she repeatedly encounters overwhelming heartbreak from the deaths of several family members, her child, and an elderly woman whom she befriended during the regime. Despite the enormous gravity of her loss, she is able to move on with her life. Through the story of Amara, the film shows the unyielding courage and resilient strength of all survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime. "Lost Loves" is a film about the love loves of all Cambodians.

Second, this film provides a voice and encouragement to survivors who are unable or have a difficult time talking about what happened to them. Although there are millions of victims of the Khmer Rouge regime, many of them feel alone in their suffering and pain. This is the result of decades of silence- a silence that was both an official policy and socially maintained. At the national level, a shared sense of suffering or an openness to reveal or



Leang – played by Chea Leakhena.

Cambodians have been too busy struggling to move forward to devote time for reflection and healing. After the fall of the regime, Cambodians have had to tackle civil war, international condemnation, electoral and societal violence, and the real struggle to simply live. Many still live below the poverty line. The concerns of feeding and taking care of oneself and one's family naturally has been prioritized above all else, including the process of coming to terms with a brutal past. The experiences depicted including those of starvation, exhaustion, separation from family members, and the loss of family members, are universal among victims of the regime. This film provides a needed space for people to remember, feel, understand, and witness the tragedy of Democratic Kampuchea. Its perspective comes directly from the hearts and spirits of survivors and as such, has the ability to genuinely reach out to and represent them. Thus, survivors who still have a hard time confronting their past can watch this film and feel a sense of solidarity and community. Moreover, after watching this film, they will know that it is important to remember and okay to cry; these are both ways to help one cope with the past.



Deth (the boy) -- played by Heng Vathana, Amara, and Nita -- played by Pok Marineath.

Third, "Lost Loves," serves as a tool for educating Cambodia's young generation about the Khmer Rouge period so that they can understand and **believe** the experiences of their parents as well as learn about an important part of their country's history. As such, this film continues the critical mission of teaching the generation born after the regime about Democratic Kampuchea so

that they will not repeat the past. Even if some children still refuse to believe, the survivor generation must continue to educate them regardless. As Director Chhay has made poignantly clear, the survivor generation must never give in to the disbelief of Cambodian youths. Their disbelief should not discourage, but instead motivate the survivor generation to continue telling the story of what happened under Democratic Kampuchea.

Further, the film can also help to promote understanding, empathy, and healing among Cambodia's troubled youth. Its message is simple yet powerful: the experiences of the Khmer Rouge regime, no matter how horrific, need to be known and remembered for the sake of memory, justice, and future peace. Now more than ever, Cambodia's young generation need hear this message. In particular they need to have a strong connection with their parents and other survivors of the regime. For a number of reasons- poverty, violence in the home, absence of parental guidance, sexual abuse, the culture of corruption, the weak educational system, romantic breakups, negative role models, etc.- many of Cambodia's youth are irresponsible, undervalued, addicted to drugs, commit violent crimes, or abandon school. "Lost Loves" can help these troubled youths by showing them that despite the hardships their parents and grandparents went through, they had the courage and will to overcome them. Certainly this film is not a panacea, but it does have the potential to create a needed connection between delinquent youths and the survivor generation, especially their parents.



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trouble facing the Khmer Rouge past and educates those born after the regime about an important part of their parents' and country's history. It is a film that should be shown across Cambodia in schools and in villages.

"Lost Loves," while simple in scope and production, delivers a powerful and emotional message. From one victim to another, this film helps to create a shared sense of suffering, survival, and strength. This comforts survivors who have

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